

A
S E R M O N
Preached before the
Honourable House
O F
C O M M O N S,
At S^t. MARGARETS WESTMINSTER
Octob. 10. being the Fast-day appointed for
the late dreadfull Fire in the City of
L O N D O N.

By *Edward Stillingfleet*, B. D. Rector of *S^t. Andrews*
Holborn, and one of his Majesties Chaplains in Ordinary.

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STATION

Honorable House

OF

COMMONS

IN PARLIAMENT ASSEMBLED

ON the 14th day of February 1801

Resolved

LONDON

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AMOS 4. II.

I have overthrown some of you, as God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah, and ye were as a firebrand pluckt out of the burning: yet have ye not returned unto me, saith the Lord.



Tis but a very little time since you met together in this place to lament the remainders of a *raging pestilence*, which the last year destroyed so many thousand inhabitants of the late great and famous City: and now *God* hath given us another sad occasion for our *fasting and humiliation*, by suffering a *devouring fire* to break forth and consume so many of her habitations. As though the infected air had been too kind and partial, and like *Saul* to the *Amalekites*, had only destroyed the *vile and refuse*, and spared the *greatest of the people*; as though the grave had surfeited with the bodies of the dead, and were loath to go on in the

the execution of *Gods* displeasure ; he hath employed a more furious element, which by its merciless and devouring flames might in a more lively manner represent unto us the *kindling* of his *wrath* against us. And that by a *Fire*, which began with that violence, and spread with that horror, and raged with that fury, and continued for so long a time with that irresistible force ; that it might justly fill the beholders with confusion, the hearers of it with amazement, and all of us with a deep and humble sense of those sins which have brought down the judgements of *God* in so severe a manner in the midst of us.

For what ever arguments or reasons we can imagine, that should compose the minds of men to a sense of their own or others calamities, or excite them to an apprehension of the *wrath* of *God* as the cause of them, or quicken them to an earnest supplication to him for mercy, they do all eminently concur in the sad occasion of this dayes solemnity. For if either compassion would move, or fear awaken, or interest engage us to any of these, it is hard to conceive there should be an instance of a more efficacious nature, than that is which we this day bewail ; For who can behold the ruines of so great a City, and not have his bowels of compassion moved towards it ? Who can have any sense of the anger of *God* discovered in it, and not have his fear awakened by it ? Who can (as we ought all) look upon it as a judgement of universal influence on the whole Nation, and not think himself concerned to implore the mercy of heaven towards us ? For certainly, however we may vainly flatter and deceive
our

our selves, these are no common indications of the frowns of heaven; nor are they meerly intended as the expressions of *Gods* severity towards that City which hath suffered so much by them; but the strokes which fall upon the head (though they light upon that only) are designed for the punishment of the whole body.

Were there nothing else but a bare permission of Divine Providence as to these things, we could not reasonably think, but that *God* must needs be very angry with us, when he suffers two such dreadful calamities to tread almost upon each others heels; that no sooner had *death* taken away such multitudes of our inhabitants, but a *Fire* follows it to consume our habitations. A *Fire*, so dreadfull in its appearance, in its rage and fury, and in all the dismall consequences of it (which we cannot yet be sufficiently apprehensive of) that on that very account we may justly lie down in our shame, and our confusion cover us: Lam. 2. 1. because *God* hath covered the daughter of *Sion* with a cloud in his anger, and cast down from heaven to earth the beauty of *Israel*, and remembred not his footstool in the day of his anger. For such was the violence and fury of the flames, that they have not only defaced the beauty of the City, and humbled the pride and grandeur of it; not only stained its glory, and consumed its palaces; but have made the Houses of *God* themselves a heap of ruins, and a spectacle of desolation.

And what then can we propose to our selves as arguments of *Gods* severe displeasure against us, which we have not either already felt, or have just

cause to fear are coming upon us without a speedy
 and sincere amendment? If a Sword abroad, and
 Pestilence at home, if Fire in our Houses, and Death
 in our Streets, if Forreign Wars, and Domestick
 Factions, if a languishing State and a discontented
 People, if the ruines of the City and poverty of the
 Countrey, may make us sensible how sad our con-
 dition at present is, how much worse it may be
 (if *God* in his mercy prevent it not) we shall all
 surely think we have reason enough this day to lay
 to heart *the evil of our doings which have brought all*
these things upon us, and abhor our selves, repenting in
dust and ashes. That would seem indeed to bear
 some analogy with the present ruines of the City,
 and the calamities we lie under at this time; but
God will more easily dispense with the pompous
 shews, and solemn garbs of our humiliation; if our
 hearts bleed within for our former impieties, and
 our repentance discovers its sincerity, by bringing us
 to that temper; that, *though we have done iniquity,*
we will do so no more. That is the true and proper
 end which *Almighty God* aims at in all his Judge-
 ments; he takes no delight in hurling the world
 into confusions, and turning Cities into ruinous
 heaps, and making whole Countries a desolation:
 but when he sees it necessary to vindicate the ho-
 nour of his Justice to the world, he doth it with that
severity that may make us apprehend his displeasure,
 and yet with that *mercy* which may encourage us to
 repent and *return unto the Lord.* Thus we find in
 the instances recorded in the Text, when some *Ci-*
ties were consumed by him; so that as far as concerned
 them,

them, they were made *like to Sodom and Gomorrah*; yet he doth it with that kindness to the *Inhabitants*, that *they are pluckt as firebrands out of the burning*: and therefore he looks upon it as a frustrating the design both of his *Justice*, and of his *Mercy*, when he is fain to conclude with that sad reflection on their incorrigibleness; *Yet have ye not returned unto me, saith the Lord.* Thus ye see what the design and scope of the words is, which I have read unto you, wherein we may consider,

1. The severity of the Judgement which God was pleased to execute upon them. *I have overthrown some of you, as God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah.*

2. The mixture of his mercy in the midst of his severity, *and ye were as a firebrand pluckt out of the burning.*

3. The incorrigibleness of the people notwithstanding both. *Yet have ye not, &c.* In the first we have *Gods Rod* lifted up to *strike*; in the second we have *Gods Hand* stretched out to *save*, yet neither of these would make them sensible of their disobedience; though their *Cities* were *overthrown* for *their sakes*, though they themselves escaped *not for their own sakes*, but for his *mercies sake* only whom they had so highly provoked; *yet have ye not returned unto me, saith the Lord.* I am sure I may say of the two former parts of the Text, as our *Saviour* doth in another case, *This day hath this Scripture been fulfilled among you*; we have seen a sad instance of *Gods severity*, a *City* almost wholly consumed as *Sodom and Gomorrah*,
and

and a great expression of his kindness, *the Inhabitants saved, as firebrands pluckt out of the burning*: O let it never be said that the last part of the words is fulfilled too, *Yet have ye not returned unto me, &c.* which, that it may not be, I shall first consider *the severity of God in his judgement this day*, and then discover *the mixture of his kindness with it*, and the result of both will be *the unreasonableness of obstinate disobedience* after them.

1. *The severity of the Judgement* here expressed; which, though we take it not in reference to the persons of men, but to the Cities wherein they dwelt; as it seems to be understood not only by the *Original*, wherein the words relating to persons are left out; but by the following clause, expressing their preservation; yet we shall find the Judgement to be severe enough, in regard 1. Of the *nature and kind* of it. 2. The *series and order* of it. 3. The *causes* moving to it. 4. The *Author* of it. *I have overthrown some of you, as God overthrew, &c.*

1. *The nature and kind of it*: We can imagine nothing more severe when we consider what it is set forth by, the most unparalleled Judgement we read of, *viz. the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah* by a fire from Heaven. Although in all circumstances the instance might not come up to the parallel, yet in several respects there might be so sad a desolation, that any other example but that might fall beneath the greatness and severity of it. And we may better understand of how sad and dreadful a nature such a Judgement must be, if we consider it with relation to the *suddenness and unexpectedness* of
of

of it, to the force and violence of it, and to all that sad train of circumstances which attend and follow it.

1. *The suddenness and unexpectedness of it*: as God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah, i. e. when they least of all looked for such a desolation. For thus it was in the dayes of Lot (as our Saviour tells us) they did eat, they drank, they bought, they sold, they planted, they builded; but the same day that Lot went out of Sodom, it rained fire and brimstone from Heaven, and destroyed them all. They were all immersed either in their pleasures or in their business, they little thought of destruction being so near them as it proved to be; Thus it was with the Jewes in their first and latter destruction both of their City and Countrey, they were as high and as confident of the contrary as might be to the very last; nothing could perswade them that their Temple or their City should be burnt with Fire, till they saw them flaming before their eyes. Thus Josephus observes of his own Countrey-men, that in the midst of all their miseries they had no kind of sense at all of their sins, but were as proud, presumptuous and arrogant, as if all things went well with them; and were like to do so.

Luke 17.
28, 29.

Ἡ γὰρ αὐτοῖς μετὰ
τοιαῦτα ἔδειξα ἵνα
καὶ αὐτοὶ, ἀναλαβόμενοι
ὡς ἐπ' ἀγαθῶν. de
bell. Jud. l. 7. c. 14.

They thought God could not possibly punish such a people as they were in such a manner; they could easily have believed it of any other people but themselves: but that God should punish his own people in Covenant with him, that judgement should begin at the house of God, that they who had loved to be called by his name, should be made examples to all

other Nations; this seemed so harsh and incredible that by no means could they entertain it. But *God* and Wise men too thought otherwise of them than they did of themselves: they could not but see an outward shew of Religion joyned with a deep and subtile hypocrisie; there being among them an heap of pride and luxury, of fraud and injustice, of sedition and faction guilded over with a fair shew of greater zeal for *God* and his *Glory*: which that impartial Historian (as one who knew them well) hath described at large: and although they could not believe that such heavy Judgements should befall them, yet others did not only *believe*, but *tremble* at the apprehensions of them.

Who among all the Citizens of *London* could have been perswaded, but the day before the *Fire* brake out, nay when they saw the *flames* for near a day together, that ever in four days time, not a fourth part of the City should be left standing? For when were they ever more secure and inapprehensive of their danger then at this time? they had not been long returned to their Houses, which the *Plague* had driven them from, and now they hoped to make some amends for the loss of their Trade before; but they returned home with the same sins they carried away with them; like new *Moons*, they had a new face and appearance, but the same *spots* remained still: or it may be, increased by that *scum* they had gathered in the Countreyes where they had been. Like Beasts of prey that had been chained up so long till they were hunger-bitten, when they once got loose they ran with that violence and greediness to their
ways

wayes of gain, as though nothing could ever satisfie them. But that which betrayed them to so much security, was their late deliverance from so sweeping a Judgment as the *Plagne* had been to the City and Suburbs of it: they could by no means think, when they had all so lately escaped the *Grave*, that the City it self should be so near being buried in its own ruines; that the *Fire* which had missed their blood should seize upon their houses; that there should be no other way to purge the infected air, but by the *flames* of the whole City. Thus when the Mariners have newly escaped a wreck at Sea the fears of which have a long time deprived them of their wonted rest, they think they may securely lye down and sleep, till it may be another storm overtake and sink them. We see then there is neither piety nor wisdom in so much security when a great danger is over, for we know not but that very security it self may provoke *God* to send a greater. And no kind of judgements are so dreadful and amazing, as those which come most unexpectedly upon men; for these betray the succours which reason offers, they infatuate mens councils, weaken their courage, and deprive them of that presence of mind which is necessary at such a time for their own and the publick interest. And there needs no more to let us know how severe such a Judgement must be when it comes upon men in so sudden and unexpected a manner: but that is not all, for the severity of it lyes further,

2. *In the force and violence of it*: and surely that was very great which consumed four Cities to no-

Jude 7.

thing in so short a time, when *God* did *pluere Gehennam de cælo* as one expresses it, rained down hell-fire upon *Sodom and Gomorrah*. And this is that which some think is called *the vengeance of eternal fire*, which all those in *Sodom and Gomorrah* are said to suffer; i. e. a *Fire* which consumed, till there was nothing left to be consumed by it. Not but that those wicked persons did justly suffer the *vengeance of an eternal fire* in another life, but the *Apostle* seems to set out and paint forth to us that in the life to come, by the force and violence of that *Fire* which destroyed those *Cities*; and it would be harsh to say, that all who were involved in that common calamity (who yet were innocent as to the great abominations of those places, viz. the *Infants* there destroyed) must be immediately sentenced to eternal misery. But although *God* since that perpetual monument of his justice in the destruction of those *Cities* hath not by such an immediate fire from heaven consumed and razed out the very foundations of other *Cities*; yet at some times there are *fires* which break out and rage with a more then ordinary violence, and will not yield to those attempts for quenching them, which at other times may be attended with great success. Such might that great fire in *Rome* be in *Nero's* time, which whether begun *casually*, or by *design* (as it was disputed then, as it hath been about others since) did presently spread it self with greater speed over the *Circue* (as the *Historian* tells us) then the *Wind* it self, and never left burning, till of fourteen *regions* in *Rome*, but four were left entire. Such might that be in the *Emperour Titus* his time, which

Tacit. An.
15.

which lasted three dayes and nights, and was so irresistible in its fury, that the Historian tells us, *it was certainly more then an ordinary fire.* Such might that be in the same City in the time of *Commodus*, which though all the art and industry imaginable were used for the quenching it, yet it burnt, till it had consumed besides the *Temple of Peace*, the fairest Houses and Palaces of the City, which on that account, the *Historians* attribute to more then natural causes. Such might that be (which comes the nearest of any I have met with, to that *Fire* we this day lament the effects of) I mean that at *Constantinople*, which happen'd *A.D.* 465.

in the beginning of *September*; it brake forth by the water side, and raged with that horrible fury for four days together, that it burnt down the greatest part of the City, and was so little capable of resistance, that as *Evagrius* tell us, the strongest Houses were but ὡς πρὸς τι φρυγανῶδες, like so much dried stubble before it; by which means the whole City was, as he calls it, δεικτεστάτων δέμας, a most miserable and doleful spectacle; so that as *Baronius* expresses it, that City which before was accounted the wonder of the world, was made like to *Sodom* and *Gomorrah*. Such likewise might those two great Fires have been which have formerly burnt down great part of the then City of *London*; but neither of them come near the dreadfulnes of this, considering how much bigger the habitations of the City were now, and how much greater the riches of it then could be imagined.

Οὕτω τε τὸ κακὸν ἐκ
ἀνθρώπων ἀλλὰ δαι-
μόνιον ἐξήλθε. Xiphilins.
Epit. Dion. in Tit. p. 227.

Ὅθεν καὶ τὸ πᾶν ἔργον
ἐξελείβετο, πικρῶν
κατ' ἐκείνη καί τις τῶν
ἀνθρώπων, ὅτι
γνώμη δέσπῃ καὶ δυνάμει
ἤρξατο τὸ τὸ πῦρ καὶ
ἐπαύσατο. Herodian. in
Commod. hist. l. 1. p. 22.
v. Xiphil. ad fin. Commodi.

Niceph. l.
15. c. 21.
Evagr. l. 2.
cap. 13.
Baron. Tom.
5. A. 465. 1.

gined at those times. How great must we conceive the force of this Fire to have been, which having at first gotten a head where there was little means of resisting it, and much fuel to increase it; from thence it spread it self both with and against the wind; till it had gained so considerable a force, that it despised all the resistance could be made by the strength of the buildings which stood in its way; and when it had once subdued the strongest and the tallest of them, it then roared like the waves of the Sea, and made its way through all the lesser obstacles, and might have gone on so far, till it had laid this *City* levell with the ruines of the other, had not he who sets the bounds to the *Ocean*, and saith, *thus far shalt thou go and no further*, put a stop to it in those places which were as ready to have yielded up themselves to the rage of it, as any which had been consumed before.

3. The severity of it will yet more appear from all the *dreadfull circumstances which attend and follow it*. Could you suppose your selves in the midst of those Cities which were consumed by *Fire* from heaven, when it had seized upon their dwellings, O what cryes and lamentations, what yellings and shriekings might ye then have heard among them! We may well think how dreadfull those were, when we do but consider how sad the circumstances were of the *Fire* we mourn for this day. When it began like *Sampson* to break in pieces all the means of resisting it, and carried before it not only the *Gates*, but the *Churches* and most *magnificent structures* of the *City*, what horror and confusion may we then imagine had
had

had seized upon the spirits of the *Citizens*; what
 distraction in their councils, what paleness in their
 countenances, what pantings at their hearts, what
 an universal consternation might have been then seen
 upon the minds of men? But O the sighs and tears,
 the frights and amazements, the miscarriages, nay
 the deaths of some of the weaker Sex at the terrour
 and apprehension of it! O the hurry and useless
 pains, the alarms and tumults, the mutual hinde-
 rances of each other that were among men at the
 beholding the rage and fury of it! There we might
 have seen Women weeping for their Children for fear
 of their being trod down in the press, or lost in
 the crowd of people, or exposed to the violence of
 the flames; Husbands more solicitous for the safety
 of their Wives and Children, than their own; the
 Souldiers running to their Swords, when there was
 more need of Buckets; the Tradesmen loading their
 backs with that which had gotten possession of their
 hearts before. Then we might have heard some
 complaining thus of themselves: O that I had been
 as carefull of laying up treasures in Heaven as I
 have been upon Earth, I had not been under such
 fears of losing them as now I am! If I had served
God as faithfully as I have done the world, he
 would never have left me, as now that is like to do.
 What a fool have I been which have spent all my
 pretious time for the gaining of that which may be
 now lost in an hours time! If these flames be so dread-
 full, what are those which are reserved for them
 who love the world more then *God*! If none can
 come near the heat of this *Fire*, who can dwell with
 everlasting

everlasting burnings! O what madness then will it be to sin any more wilfully against that *God* who is a *consuming Fire*, infinitely more dreadfull than this can be! Farewell then all ye deceitfull vanities; now I understand thee and my self better, O bewitching world, then to fix my happiness in thee any more. I will henceforth learn so much wisdom to lay up my treasures there where neither moths can corrupt them, nor Thieves steal them, nor Fire consume them. O how happy would *London* be, if this were the effect of her flames on the minds of all her inhabitants! She might then rise with a greater glory, and her inward beauty would outshine her outward splendour, let it be as great as we can wish or imagine.

But in the mean time, who can behold her present ruines, without paying some tears as due to the sadness of the spectacle, and more to the sins which caused them? If that City were able to speak out of its ruines, what sad complaints would it make of all those impieties which have made her so miserable. If it had not been (might she say) for the pride and luxury, the ease and delicacy of some of my inhabitants, the covetousness, the fraud, the injustice of others, the debaucheries of the profane, the open factions and secret hypocrisie of too many pretending to greater sanctity, my *beauty* had not been thus *turned into ashes*, nor my glory into those ruines which make my enemies rejoyce, my friends to mourn; and all stand amazed at the beholding of them. Look now upon me, you who so lately admired the greatness of my trade, the riches of my Merchants,

Merchants, the number of my people, the conveni-
 ency of my *Churches*, the multitude of my Streets,
 and see what desolations sin hath made in the earth.
 Look upon me, and then tell me whether it be no-
 thing to dally with Heaven, to make a mock at sin,
 to slight the judgements of *God*, and abuse his mer-
 cies, and after all the attempts of Heaven to reclaim
 a people from their sins, to remain still the same that
 ever they were? Was there no way to expiate your
 guilt but by my misery? Had the *leprosie* of your sins
 so fretted into my walls, that there was no cleansing
 them, but by the flames which consume them? Must
 I mourn in *my dust and ashes* for your iniquities, while
 you are so ready to return to the practise of them?
 Have I suffered so much by reason of *them*, and do
 you think to escape your selves? Can you then look
 upon my ruines with hearts as hard and unconcerned,
 as the *stones* which lye in them? If you have any
 kindness for me, or for your selves, if you ever
 hope to see my breaches repaired, my beauty re-
 stored, my glory advanced, look on *Londons*
 ruines and *repent*. Thus would she bid her in-
 habitants not weep for her miseries, but for
 their own sins; for if *never any sorrow were like to*
her sorrow, it is because never any sins were like
 to their sins. Not as though they were only the sins
 of the City which have brought this evil upon her;
 no, but as far as the judgement reaches, so great hath
 the compass of the sins been, which have provoked
God to make her an example of his justice. And I
 fear the effects of *Londons* calamity will be felt all
 the Nation over.

C

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guishing condition of this Nation, it will be no easie matter to recover the *blood* and *spirits* which have been lost by this *Fire*. So that whether we consider the sadness of those circumstances which accompanied the rage of the fire, or those which respect the present miseries of the City, or the general influence those will have upon the Nation, we cannot easily conceive what judgement could in so *criticall* a time have befallen us, which had been more severe for the *kind* and *nature* of it, than this hath been.

2. We consider it *in the series and order of it*. We see by the *Text*, this comes in the last place, as a reserve when nothing else would do any good upon them. It is *extrema medicina*, as *St. Hierom* saith, the last attempt that *God* uses to reclaim a people by, and if these *Causticks* will not do, it is to be feared he looks on the wounds as incurable. He had sent a *famine* before v. 6. a *drought*, v. 7, 8. *blasting and mildew*, v. 9. *the Pestilence after the manner of Egypt*, v. 10. *the miseries of War* in the same verse. And when none of these would work that effect upon them, which they were designed for, then he comes to his last way of punishing before a final destruction, *he overthrew some of their Cities as he had overthrown Sodom and Gomorrah*. *God* forbid, we should be so near a final subversion and utter desolation, as the ten Tribes were, when none of these things would bring them to repentance; but yet the method *God* hath used with us seems to *bode* very ill in case we do not at last *return to the Lord*. For it is not only agreeable to what is here delivered as the course *God* used to reclaim the *Israelites*,
but

*Hieron. in
loc.*

but to what is reported by the most faithful *Historian* of those times of the degrees and steps that *God* made before the ruines of the *British Nation*. *Gildas de excid. Brit.* For *Gildas* tells us the decay of it began by *Civil Wars* among themselves, and *high discontents* remaining as the consequents of them, after this an *universal decay and poverty* among them; after that, nay during the continuance of it, *Wars* with the *Picts* and *Scots* their inveterate enemies: but no sooner had they a little breathing space, but they return to their luxury and other sins again; then *God* sends among them a *consuming Pestilence* which destroyed an incredible number of people. When all this would not do, those whom they trusted most to, betrayed them, and rebelled against them, by whose means, not only the *Cities* were burnt with *Fire*, but the whole *Island* was turned almost into one *continued flame*. The issue of all which at last was, that their *Countrey* was turned to a desolation, the ancient *Inhabitants* driven out, or destroyed, and their former servants, but now their bitter enemies, possessing their *habitations*. May *God* avert the *Omen* from us at this day. We have smarted by *Civil Wars*, and the dreadful effects of them; we yet complain of *great discontents* and *poverty* as great as them, we have *inveterate enemies* combined abroad against us, we have very lately suffered under a *Pestilence* as great almost as any we read of, and now the *great City* of our *Nation* burnt down by a *dreadfull Fire*. And what do all these things mean? and what will the issue of them be? though that be lockt up in the *Councils* of *Heaven*, yet we have

just cause to fear if it be not our speedy amendment, it may be our ruine. And they who think that incredible, let them tell me whether two years since, they did not think it altogether as improbable, that in the compass of the two succeeding years, above a hundred thousand persons should be destroyed by the Plague in London and other places, and the City it self should be burnt to the Ground? And if our fears do not, I am sure our sins may tell us, that these are but the fore-runners of greater calamities, in case there be not a timely reformation of our selves. And although God may give us some intermissions of punishments, yet at last he may, as the Roman Consul expressed it, pay us *intercalatæ pœnæ usuram*, that which may make amends for all his abatements, and give us full measure according to that of our sins, *pressed down, shaken together and running over*. Which leads to the third particular.

3. The causes moving God to so much severity in his Judgements, which are the greatness of the sins committed against him. So this Prophet tells us that the true account of all Gods punishments is to be fetched from the sins of the people, Amos i. 3. For three transgressions of Damascus, and for four I will not turn away the punishment thereof: so it is said of Gaza, v. 6. of Tyrus, v. 9. of Edom, v. 11. of Ammon, v. 13. Moab, ch. 2. 1. Judah, v. 4. and at last Israel, v. 6. And it is observable of every one of these, that when God threatens to punish them for the greatness of their iniquities, and the multitude of their transgressions, (which is generally supposed to be meant by the three transgressions and the four) he doth particularly

larly threaten to send a *Fire* among them to consume the Houses and the Palaces of their Cities. So to *Damascus*, chap. I. 4. to *Gaza*, v. 7. to *Tyrus*, v. 10. to *Edom*, v. 12. to *Ammon*, v. 14. to *Moab*, ch. 2. v. 2. to *Judah*, v. 5. *I will send a fire upon Judah, and it shall devour the Palaces of Jerusalem*: and *Israel* in the words of the text. This is a judgement then, which when it comes in its *fury*, gives us notice to how great a height our sins are risen; especially when it hath so many dreadfull fore-runners, as it had in *Israel*, and hath had among our selves. When the *red horse* hath marched furiously before it all *bloody* with the effects of a *Civil War*, and the *pale horse* hath followed after the other with *Death* upon his back, and the *Grave* at his heels, and after both these, those come, *out of whose mouth issues fire, and smoke, and brimstone*, it is then time for the inhabitants of the earth to *repent of the work of their hands*. But it is our great unhappiness that we are apt to impute these great calamities to any thing rather than to our *sins*; and thereby we hinder our selves from the true remedy, because we will not understand the cause of our distemper. Though *God* hath not sent *Prophets* among us, to tell us for such and such sins, I will send such and such judgements upon you, yet where we observe the parallel between the *sins* and the *punishments* agreeable with what we find recorded in *Scripture*, we have reason to say that those sins were not only the *antecedents*, but the *causes* of those punishments which followed after them. And that because the reason of punishment was not built upon any particular relation between *God* and the people of *Israel*, but upon rea-

sons common to all mankind; yet with this difference, that the greater the mercies were which any people enjoyed, the sooner was the measure of their iniquities filled up, and the severer were the judgments when they came upon them. This our *Prophet* gives an account of Chap. 3. 2. *You only have I known of all the Nations of the earth, therefore will I punish you for your iniquities.* So did God punish *Tyre* and *Damascus*, as well as *Israel* and *Judah*, but his meaning is, he would punish them sooner, he would punish them more severely. I wish we could be brought once to consider what influence *piety* and *virtue* hath upon the good of a Nation; if we did, we should not only live better our selves, but our *Kingdom* and *Nation* might flourish more than otherwise we are like to see it do. Which is a truth hath been so universally received among the wise Men of all ages, that one of the *Roman Historians*, though of no very severe life himself, yet imputes the decay of the *Roman State*, not to Chance or Fortune, or some unhidden causes (which the *Atheism* of our age would presently do) but to the generall looseness of mens lives and corruption of their manners. And it was the grave Observation of one of the bravest Captains ever the *Roman State* had, *that it was impossible for any State to be happy, stantibus moribus, ruentibus moribus*, though their walls were firm, if their manners were decayed. But it is our misery, that our walls and our manners are fallen together, or rather the latter undermined the former. They are our sins which have drawn so much of our blood, and infected our air, and added the greatest fuel to our flames.

But

Scipio apud
Aug. de
Civ. D. I.
l. c. 33.

But it is not enough in general to declaim against our *sins*, but we must search out particularly those predominant vices which by their *boldness* and *frequency* have provoked *God* thus to punish us; and as we have hitherto observed a parallel between the *Judgements* of *Israel* in this Chapter and our *own*: so I am afraid we shall find too sad a parallel between *their sins* and *ours* too. Three sorts of *sins* are here spoken of in a peculiar manner, as the causes of their severe punishments, Their *luxury and intemperance*, their *covetousness and oppression*, and their *contempt of God and his Laws*, and I doubt we need not make a very exact *scrutiny* to find out these in a high degree among our selves: and I wish it were as easie to reform them as to find them out.

1. *Luxury and intemperance*: that we meet with in the first verse, both in the compellation, *Ye Kine of Bashan*, and in their behaviour, *which say to their Masters, bring, and let us drink. Ye Kine of Bashan, Loquitur ad principes Israel & optimates quosque decem Tribuum*, saith *S^t. Hierom*, he speaks to the *Princes of Israel, and the chief of all the ten Tribes*: those which are fed in the richest pastures, such as those of *Bashan* were. Who are more fully described by the *Prophet* in his sixth chapter. They are the men who are at ease in *Sion*; v. 1. they put far away from them the evil day, v. 3. they lye upon beds of *Ivory*, and stretch themselves upon their couches, and eat the *Lambs* out of the flock, and the *Calves* out of the midst of the stall, v. 4. they chaunt to the sound of the viol, and invent to themselves instruments of musick like *David*,

vid, v. 5. *they drink Wine in bowls, and anoint themselves with the chief ointments, but they are not grieved for the affliction of Joseph.* The meaning of all which is, they minded nothing but ease, softness, and pleasure, but could not endure to hear of the calamities which were so near them. Nothing but mirth, and jollity, and riot, and feasting, and the evil consequences of these were to be seen or heard among them. Their delicate souls were presently ruffled and disturbed at the discourse of any thing but matters of Courtship, address and entertainment. Any thing that was grave and serious, though never so necessary and of the greatest importance, was put off, as *Felix* put off *S^t. Paul* to a more convenient time: especially if it threatned miseries to them, and appeared with a countenance sadder than their own. These were the *Kine of Bashan*, who were full of ease and wantonness, and never thought of the *day of slaughter*, which the other were the certain fore-runners of. *Symmachus* renders it, *ἐν βίῳ ὁρῶντες*, which others apply to the rich Citizens of *Samaria*. I am afraid we may take it in either sense without a *Solæcism*. *Bring and let us drink*, which as *S^t. Hierom* goes on, *ebrietatem significat in vino & luxuria quæ statum mentis evertunt*, it implies the height of their luxury and intemperance. It is observed by some, that our *Prophet* retains still the language of his education in the bluntness of his expressions, the great men that lived wholly at their ease, in wantonness and luxury, he styles like the *herdsman of Tekoa*, the *Kine of Bashan*. That he thought was title good enough for such who seemed to have souls for no other

other end, then the other had. And hath not that *delicata insania*, as S^t. *Austin* calls it, that soft and effeminate kind of madness taken possession of too many among us, whose birth and education designed them for more manly imployments? Yea, what an age of *Luxury* do we live in, when instead of those noble characters of men from their vertue, and wisdom, and courage, it is looked on among some as a mighty character of a person, that *he eats and drinks well*: a character that becomes none so much as the *Kine of Bashan* in the literal sense, for surely they did so, or else they had never been in so much esteem among the *herdsmen of Tekoa*. A character which those *Philosophers* would have been ashamed of, who looked upon no other end of humane life but *pleasure*; but in order to that, they thought nothing more necessary then *temperance* and *sobriety*; but whatever esteem they had then they have lost all their reputation among our modern *Epicures*, who know of no such things as *pleasures of the mind*, and would not much value whether they had any *faculties* of the *mind* or no, unless it were for the contrivance of new oaths and debaucheries. But if this were only among some few persons, we hope the whole Nation would not suffer for their madness: for scarce any age hath been so happy, but it hath had some *monsters* in *Morality* as well as *Nature*. But I am afraid these vices are grown too *Epidemical*; not only in the *City*, but the *Countries* too; what mean else those frequent complaints (and I hope more general then the causes of them) that the houses of great men in too many places are so near being pub-

lick schools of debauchery, rather then of piety and vertue, where men shall not want instructors to teach them to forget both God and themselves; wherein sobriety is so far from being accounted a matter of honour, that the rules of the Persian civility are quite forgotten, and men are forced to unman themselves. I know nothing would tend more to the honour of our Nation, or the advantage of it, then if once these publick excesses were severely restrained, I do not mean so much by making new Laws, (for those generally do but exercise peoples Wits by finding out new evasions) but by executing old ones.

2. *Covetousness and oppression.* You see what these great men in *Samaria* did when they had any respite from their excesses and intemperance, then woe be to the poor who come in their way; *Which oppresses the poor and crush the needy: v. i.* either by the hands of violence, or by those arts and devices which either their honesty or poverty have kept them from the knowledge of. And if there be not so much of open violence in our dayes, the thanks are due to the care of our *Magistrates*, and the severity of our *Laws*, but it is hard to say whether ever any age produced more studious and skilfull to pervert the design of *Laws* without breaking the letter of them, than this of ours hath done. Fraud and injustice is now managed with a great deal of artifice and cunning; and he thinks himself no body in the understanding of the world, that cannot over-reach his brother, and not be discovered: or however in the multiplicity and obscurity of our *Laws* cannot find out something in pretence at least
to

to justify his actions by. But if appeal be made to the Courts of Judicature, what arts are then used either for concealing or hiring witnesses, so that if their Purse be not equall, the adverse party may overswear him by so much as his Purse is weightier then the others. 1

I heartily wish it may never be said of us, what the Orator once said of the Greeks, *Quibus jusjurandum* cicer. pro jocus, testimonium ludus, they made it a matter of jest Flacco. and drollery to forswear themselves, and give false testimonies. But supposing men keep within the bounds of justice and common honesty, yet how unsatiable are the desires of men? they are for adding house to house, and land to land, never contented with what either their Ancestors have left them, or the bountifull hand of heaven hath bestowed upon them. Till at last it may be in the Prophets expression for their covetousness, the stone cry out of the wall, and the beam out of the timber answer it : i.e. provoke God to give a severe check to the exorbitant and boundless desires of men, as he hath done by this dayes calamity. Thus while the City thought with Babylon to sit as a Lady for ever, while she dwelt carelessly, and said I am, Isai. 47. 7, 8, 11. and there is none else besides me; evil is come upon her, and she knows not from whence it comes, and mischief is fallen upon her, and she hath not been able to put it off, and desolation is come upon her suddenly, which she did not foresee.

3. Contempt of God and his Laws. That we read of v. 4. where the Prophet speaks by an Irony to them, Come to Bethel and transgress, &c. he knew well enough they were resolved to do it, let God or the Prophet say what they pleased. For these Kings of

Basban were all for the *Calves* of *Dan* and *Bethel*, and some think that is the reason of the title that is given them. These great men of *Samaria* thought it beneath them to own *Religion* any further than it was subservient to their civil interests. They were all of *Jeroboams Religion*, who looked on it as a meer *politick thing*, and fit to advance his own designs by. I am afraid there are too many at this day who are secretly of his mind, and think it a piece of *wisdom* to be so: *Blessed God*, that men should be so wise to deceive themselves, and go down with so much discretion to Hell! These are the Grave and retired *Atheists*, who though they secretly love not *Religion*, yet their caution hinders them from talking much against it. But there is a sort of men much more common than the other; the faculties of whose minds are so thin and airy, that they will not bear the consideration of any thing, much less of *Religion*; these throw out their bitter scoffs and prophane jests against it. A thing never permitted that I know of in any civilized Nation in the world; whatsoever their *Religion* was, the reputation of *Religion* was alwayes preserved sacred: *God* himself would not suffer the *Jews* to speak evil of other *Gods*, though they were to destroy all those who tempted them to the worship of them. And shall we suffer the most excellent and reasonable *Religion* in the world, *viz.* the *Christian*, to be profaned by the unhallowed mouths of any who will venture to be damned, to be accounted witty? If their enquiries were deeper, their reason stronger, or their arguments more perswasive, than of those
who

who have made it their utmost care and business to search into these things, they ought to be allowed a fair hearing; but for men who pretend to none of these things, yet still to make religion the object of their *scotts* and *raillery*, doth not become the gravity of a Nation professing wisdom to permit it, much less the sobriety of a people professing *Christianity*. In the mean time such persons may know that wise men may be argued out of a *Religion* they own, but none but *Fools* and *mad men* will be *droll'd* out of it. Let them first try whether they can laugh men out of their Estates, before they attempt to do it out of their hopes of an eternal happiness. And I am sure it will be no comfort to them in another world, that they were accounted *Wits* for deriding those miseries which they then feel and smart under the severity of: it will be no *mitigation* of their *flames* that they go *laughing* into them; nor will they endure them the better because they would not believe them. But while this is so prevailing a *humour* among the vain men of this age and Nation, what can we expect but that *God* should by remarkable and severe judgments seek to make men more serious in *Religion*, or else make their *hearts to ake* and their *joints to tremble*, as he did *Belsazzars*, when he could find nothing else to carouse in but the *vessels of the Temple*. And when men said in the Prophet *Zephany*, chap. I. 12. that *God* neither did good nor evil, presently it follows, therefore their goods shall become a booty, and their houses a desolation: the day of the Lord is near, a day of wrath, a day of trouble and

Zeph. I.
13, 14, 15

and distress, a day of wastness and desolation: as it is with us at this time. Thus we see how sad the parallel hath been not only in the judgements of Israel, but in the sins likewise which have made those judgements so severe.

4. The severity of the judgement appears not only from the *causes*, but from the *author* of it. *I have overthrown some of you as God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah.* God challenges the execution of his justice to himself, not only in the great day, but in his judgements here in the world.

Amos 3. 6 *Shall there be evil in a City, and the Lord hath not done it?* When God is pleased to punish men for their sins, the execution of his justice is as agreeable to his nature now, as it will be at the end of the world. We all know that he may do it if he please, and he hath told us, that *he doth and will do it*; and we know withall that without such remarkable severities, the world will hardly be kept in any awe of him. We do not find that love doth so much in the world as fear doth; there being so very few persons of tractable and ingenuous spirits. It is true of too many, what Lactantius observes of the Romans, *Nunquam Dei meminerunt, nisi dum in malis sunt, they seldom think of God, but when they are afraid of him.* And there is not only this reason as to particular persons why God should punish them, but there is a greater as to communities, and bodies of men; for although God suffers wicked men to escape punishment here, as he often doth; yet he is sure not to do it in the life to come; but communities

Lact. l. 2.
c. 1.

ties of men can never be punished but in this world ; and therefore the justice of *God* doth often discover it self in these common calamities, to keep the world in subjection to him, and to let men see that neither the *multitude* of their *associates*, nor the *depth* of their *designs*, nor the *subtily* of their *Councils* can secure them from the omnipotent arm of Divine Justice, when he hath determined to *visit their transgressions with rods*, and *their iniquities with stripes*. But when he doth all this, yet his *loving kindness* doth he not utterly take from them: for in the midst of all his judgements he is pleased to remember mercy; of which we have a remarkable instance in the Text, for when *God* was overthrowing Cities, yet he *pluckt the inhabitants as fire-brands out of the burning*: and so I come from the *severity* of *God*,

2. To the mixture of his mercy in it. *And ye were as a fire-brand pluckt out of the burning*. That notes two things, *the nearness they were in to the danger*, and *the unexpectedness of their deliverance out of it*.

1. *The nearness they were in to the danger*, *Quasi torris, cujus jam magna pars absumpta est*, as some paraphrase it; *like a brand, the greatest part of which is already consumed by Fire*; which shews the difficulty of their escaping. So *Joshua* is said to be a brand pluckt out of the fire, *Zech. 3. 2*. And to this *S. Hierom* upon this place, applies that difficult passage, *1 Cor. 3. 15. they shall be saved, but so as by Fire*, noting the greatness of the danger they were in, and how hardly they should escape. And are
not:

not all the inhabitants of this City, and all of us in the suburbs of the other, whose houses *escaped* so near the *flames*, as *Firebrands pluckt out of the burning*? When the fire came on in its rage and fury, as though it would in a short time have devoured all before it, that not only this whole *City*, but so great a part of the *Suburbs* of the other should escape untouched, is (all circumstances considered) a wonderfull expression of the *kindness* of God to us in the midst of so much severity. If he had suffered the *Fire* to go on to have consumed the remainder of our *Churches* and *houses*, and laid this *City* even with the other in one continued heap of *ruines*, we must have said, *Just art thou O Lord, and righteous in all thy judgements*. We ought rather to have admired his *patience* in sparing us so long; then complain of this rigour of his justice in punishing us at last; but in stead of that he hath given us occasion this day with the *three Children* in the *fiery furnace* to praise him in the *midst* of the *flames*. For even the *inhabitants* of *London* themselves who have suffered most in this calamity, have cause to acknowledge the *mercy* of God towards them, that they are escaped themselves; though it be as the *Jews* report of *Joshua*, the *High-Priest*, when thrown into the fire by the *Chaldeans*, with *their cloaths burnt about them*. Though their habitations be consumed, and their losses otherwise may be too great, yet that in the midst of so much danger by the *flames* and the press of people, so very few should suffer the loss of their *lives*, ought to be owned by them and us as a miraculous

raculous Providence of God towards them. And therefore *not unto us, not unto us, but to his holy name be the praise of so great a preservation in the midst of so heavy a judgement.*

2. *The unexpectedness of such a deliverance;* they are not saved by their own skill and council, nor by their strength and industry, but by him who by his mighty hand did *pluck them as Fire-brands out of the burning.* Though we own the justice of God in the calamities of this day, let us not forget his *mercy* in what he hath unexpectedly rescued from the fury of the flames; that the *Royall Palaces* of our *Gracious Sovereign*, the residence of the *Nobility*, the *Houses of Parliament*, the *Courts of Judicature*, the place where we are now assembled and several others of the same nature, with other places and habitations to receive those who were burnt out of their own, stand at this day untouched with the fire (and long may they continue so) ought chiefly to be ascribed to the *power and goodness* of that God, who not only commands the *raging of the Sea*, and the *madness of the people*, but whom the *winds and the flames* obey. Although enough in a due subordination to *Divine Providence* can never be attributed to the mighty care and industry of our most *Gracious Sovereign*, and his *Royall Highness*, who by their presence and encouragement inspired a new *life and vigour* into the sinking spirits of the *Citizens*, where by God was pleased so far to succeed their endeavours, that a stop was put to the fury of the fir

in such places where it was as likely to have prevailed, as in any parts of the *City* consumed by it.

O let us not then frustrate the design of so much severity mixed with so great mercy: let it never be said, that neither judgements nor kindness will work upon us: that neither our deliverance from the *Pestilence* which *walks in darkness*, nor from the *flames* which shine as the *noon-day*, will awaken us from that *Lethargy* and security we are in by our sins: but let *God* take what course he pleases with us we are the same incorrigible people still that ever we were. For we have cause enough for our mourning and lamentation this day, (if *God* had not sent new calamities upon us) that we were no better for those we had undergone before. We have surfeited with mercies, and grown sick of the kindness of Heaven to us, and when *God* hath made us smart for our fulness and wantonness, then we grew sullen and murmured and disputed against Providence, and were willing to do any thing but repent of our sins and reform our lives. It is not many years since *God* blessed us with great and undeserved blessings, which we then thought our selves very thankfull for; but if we had been really so, we should never have provoked him who bestowed those Favours upon us in so great a degree as we have done since. Was this our requitall to *him* for restoring our *Sovereign*, to *rebell* the more against Heaven? Was this our thankfulness,

fulness for removing the *disorders of Church and State*, to bring them into our *lives*? Had we no other way of trying the continuance of *Gods goodness* to us, but by exercising his patience by our greater provocations? As though we had resolved to let the world see, there could be a more unthankfull and disobedient people then the *Jews* had been. Thus we sinned with as much security and confidence, as though we had blinded the eyes, or bribed the justice, or commanded the power of heaven: When *God* of a sudden like one highly provoked drew forth the sword of his destroying *Angel*, and by it cut off so many thousands in the midst of us. Then we fell upon our knees, and begg'd the mercy of Heaven that our lives might be spared, that we might have time to amend them: but no sooner did our fears abate, but our devotion did so too, we had soon forgotten the promises we made in the day of our distress, and I am afraid it is at this day too true of us which is said in the *Revelations* of those who had escaped the several plagues which so many had been destroyed by. *And the rest of the men which were not killed by these Plagues, yet repented not of the work of their hands.* For if we had not greedily sucked in again the poison we had only laid down while we were begging for our lives, if we had not return'd with as great fury and

Rev. 9. 20.

violence as ever to our former lusts, the removing of one judgement had not been as it were only to make way for the coming on of another. For the *grave* seemed to close up her mouth, and *death* by degrees to withdraw himself, that the *Fire might* come upon the *Stage*, to act its part too in the *Tragedy* our sins have made among us: and I pray *God* this may be the last *Act* of it. Let us not then provoke *God* to find out new methods of vengeance, and make experiments upon us of what other unheard of severities may do for our cure. But let us rather meet *God* now by our repentance, and returning to him, by our serious humiliation for our former sins, and our stedfast resolutions to return no more to the practise of them. That, that much more dangerous *infection* of our souls may be cured as well as that of our bodies, that the impure *flames* which burn within may be extinguished, that all our *luxuries* may be retrenched, our debaucheries punished, our vanities taken away, our careless indifferency in Religion turned into a greater seriousness both in the profession and the practise of it. So will *God* make us a happy and prosperous, when he finds us a more righteous and holy Nation. So will *God* succeed all your endeavours for the honour and interest of that people whom you represent. So may he add that other Title to the rest of those
 you

you have deserved for your Countreys good, to make you *Repairers of the breaches of the City* as well as of the Nation, and *restorers of paths to dwell in* ; So may that *City* which now sits solitary like a *Widow*, have her tears wiped off, and her beauty and comeliness restored unto her. Yea so may her present ruines, in which she now lyes *buried* ; be only the fore-runners of a more joyfull *resurrection*. In which though the *body* may remain the *same*, the *qualities* may be so altered, that its present desolation may be only the putting off its former inconveniencies, weakness, and deformities, that it may rise with greater glory, strength and proportion : and to all her other qualities, may that of *incorruption* be added too, at least till the generall conflagration. And I know your great *Wisdom* and *Justice* will take care, that those who have suffered by the ruines, may not likewise suffer by the rising of it ; that the glory of the *City* may not be laid upon the *tears* of the *Orphans* and *Widows*, but that its foundations may be settled upon *Justice* and *Piety*. That there be no complaining in the Streets for want of righteousness, nor in the City for want of *Churches*, nor in the *Churches* for want of a settled maintenance. That those who attend upon the service of *God* in them may never be tempted to betray their consciences to gain a livelihood, nor to comply with the factious

ctious humours of men that they may be able to live among them. And thus when the City through the blessing of Heaven shall be built again, may it be a habitation of *Holiness* towards God, of *Loyalty* towards our *Gracious King and his Successors*, of *Justice* and *Righteousness* towards men, of *Sobriety*, and *Peace*, and *Unity* among all the *Inhabitants*, till not Cities and Countreys only, but the world and time it self shall be no more. Which God of his infinite mercy grant through the merits and mediation of his *Son*, to whom with the *Father* and *Eternall Spirit*, be all Honour and Glory for evermore.

FINIS.